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# SHE TRAVELLED

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# SHE TRAVELLED

**Abstract**  
Poem

# Elizabeth Cook

## SHE TRAVELLED

Seated in the Uzuchukwu coach, I'm back  
 in Nigeria after thirty-seven years.  
 Each way I look is green —  
 forests saturated by the rain which drenches all  
 each day, then ceases like an engine  
 to be replaced by ... silence? never silence,  
 but by a kind of waiting where the kiss  
 of red-palmed foot on red-clayed ground  
 brings hope, a promise of excitement —  
 to be answered by more rain.

I'm heading east, to where, a few months old,  
 I wobbled my first steps,  
 the lines on my plump pink feet  
 grained the same orange as my friends'.  
 My first love — the handsome Daniel  
 (a man my parents called a boy)  
 returning from the market with a blue  
 and silver paper windmill, spinning  
 from the heart of his bicycle, an ever-  
 brightening bouquet. The joyful certainty  
 that this — my first love-gift — was meant for me.

My hair's been braided; skull staked out  
 in lines so tight I can't forget  
 what's inside and what's out.  
 These dark corn rows  
 straddled by wide white furrows.  
 My head feels small  
 and naked as a baby bird's, me  
 as ignorant, peering  
 this way and that, heart  
 filling with the view.

My father's bones hum  
 in my cheeks and scraped skull.  
 I bring them back to where

he grew into himself. Fledgling  
from Cambridge, he chose to learn  
his manhood in this red and green.  
Meant to shape a country,  
he made a stab at Efik and Ibo,  
tortured himself over questions of justice,  
and relied on his interpreter  
while loneliness shaped him.  
Achebe, Soyinka, Nwapa  
give me the shock of another Nigeria  
clamorous and bitter as the lobes of kola  
our driver chews to stay alert.

I'm learning; getting an ear  
for a different English. I do not walk,  
'I trek it'. The old judge  
I'd hoped to visit is away. I'm told 'he travelled' —  
neat, contained, intransitive, though everyone  
seems always on the move.

The rain resumes, the bus drives on.  
The Ibo salesman  
whose patter's full of jokes I miss  
sells Tiger Balm in little pots.  
I fall asleep and wake up at my stop.  
The bus halts just for me and I get off.